

Message Text

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43/64

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 BIB-01

SCCT-01 /058 W

----- 011243

R 031246Z MAR 75

FM AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9465

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (LINE 16 NUMBERED PARA 7 ADDED)

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJ: PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF RHEINLAND-PFALZ
PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE MARCH 9 ELECTIONS IN THEINLAND-PFALZ ARE EXPECTED TO STRENGTHEN THE HOLD OF THE CDU ON THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE AND GOVERNMENT. AS THE FIRST FDP GROUP TO MAKE A MOVE AWAY FROM THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE WITH THE SPD, THE RESULTS OBTAINED BY THE RHEINLAND-PFALZ FDP MAY POINT THE WAY TO THE PARTY'S FUTURE FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

THE CHIEF SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, IS EXPECTED TO BE THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE CDU GAINS WILL

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REINFORCE FEDERAL PARTY CHAIRMAN HELMUT KHL'S CLAIM

TO BE THE CDU CANDIDATE FOR CHANCELLOR IN THE 1976
BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS. THE KIDNAPPING OF BERLIN CDU LEADER
LORENZ MAY HAVE ENHANCED THE CDU'S AND KOHL'S PROSPECTS.
END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE ELECTIONS FOR RHEINLAND-PFALZ PROVINCIAL
LEGISLATURE (LANDTAG) MARCH 9, 2.654 MILLION PERSONS
WILL BE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE, 2.7 PERCENT MORE THAN IN 1971,
13.6 PERCENT OF WHOM WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR FIRST TIME.
WOMEN CONSTITUTE A 54 PERCENT MAJORITY. IN 1971 ELECTIONS
CDU WON 50 PERCENT, SPD 40.5 PERCENT, AND FDP 5.9 PERCENT.
IN ADDITION TO THESE THREE PARTIES, NPD, DKP AND KPD
GROUP (LATTER TECHNICALLY NOT POLITICAL PARTY) ARE TUNNING
CANDIDATES IN ALL FOUR ELECTION DISTRICTS THIS TIME.
INDEPENDENT GROUP RUNNING IN TWO DISTRICTS. THESE MINOR
PARTIES AND SPLINTER GROUPS EXPECTED GARNER COMBINED
TOTAL THREE PERCENT AT MOST.

3. CHOICE OF MARCH 9 DATE FOR ELECTIONS MEANT VERY SHORT
CAMPAIGN SINCE POLITICIANS, ESPECIALLY IN CITIES ALONG
WEST BANK OF RHINE, WOULD NOT ATTEMPT COMPETE WITH
KARNEVAL, WHICH ENDED FEBRUARY 12. PARTY LEADERS AGREED
TO LIMIT POSTERING TO FINAL THREE WEEKS OF CAMPAIGN.
EARLY DATE SELECTED BY CDU MINISTER-PRESIDENT KOHL, WHO
WANTED ELECTION BEFORE SPD/FDP FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COULD
GET CREDIT FOR ANY IMPROVEMENTS IN ECONOMY AND WHO
THROUGHT STRONG SHOWING AT BEGINNING OF SERIES OF
LANDTAG ELECTIONS WOULD CLINCH HIS CLAIM TO CDU
CHANCELLOR-CANDIDACY. SINCE TERM OF LANDTAG
ELECTED IN 1971 DOES NOT EXPIRE UNTIL MAY 18, HE WILL
NOT HAVE TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT UNTIL AFTER ELECTIONS
IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, SAARLAND AND NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN,
THUS ENABLING HIM TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF RESULTS AND PER-
HAPS INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT FORMATIONS IN THESE PROVINCES.

4. BREVITY OF CAMPAIGN AND, ESPECIALLY, UNIVERSAL
ASSUMPTION THAT CDU WILL RETAIN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY HAVE
PROCUDED LACKLUSTRE CAMPAIGN, TO BE SURE, THERE ARE
SEVERAL RALLIES EVERY NIGHT IN EACH ARES, BUT MANY OF
THEM ARE POORLY ATTENDED, THERE IS LITTLE OR NO DIS-
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CUSSION AND NO "ELECTION FEVER." KOHL AND SEVERAL OF
HIS LIEUTENANTS DRAW GOOD AUDIENCES, AND STRAUSS'
APPEARANCE HAVE BEEN MOBBED AND ENLIVENED BY HECKLERS.
(APPARENTLY BEFORE KOHL'S CDU DECIDE WHETHER TO
INVITE STRAUSS, THE CSU LEADER REQUESTED FOUR DATES
ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE BUT LATER HAD TO CANCEL ONE.)
SPD CHAIRMAN DROESCHER IS A TIRELESS CAMPAIGNER BUT A
POOR SPEAKER WHO DRAWS ONLY THE PARTY FAITHFUL. (IT

IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED HERE THAT HE WILL RETURN TO BONN IN THE AUTUMN AS SUCCESSOR TO SPD FEDERAL TREASURER NAU AND BE REPLACED IN MAINZ BY THE MORE EFFECTIVE AND APPEALING DEPUTY FACTION CHAIRMAN KARL THORWIRTH.) WILLY BRANDT DRAWS WELL, BUT CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT HAS BEEN PREVENTED BY ILLNESS FROM FULFILLING HIS HANDFUL OF COMMITMENTS. THE LOCAL SPD TEAM GOES ABOUT ITS BUSINESS ALMOST UNNOTICED.

5. THE FDP HAS GOTTEN ITSELF INTO A VERY PECULIAR POSITION. ITS FORMAL DECLARATION OF JANUARY 11 THAT IT WOULD PREFER COALITION WITH THE CDU, PROVIDED THE LATTER FAILED TO RETAIN ITS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY AND FULFILLED CERTAIN POLICY DEMANDS, AROUSED MORE CONFUSION THAN CONTROVERSY OR INTEREST. FDP LEADERS ARE CONVINCED THAT THE COALITION STATEMENT WILL GAIN THE PARTY MORE VOTES FROM LIBERALS WHO PREFER KHOL TO DORESCHER BUT DO NOT WANT THE CDU TO HAVE A OVERPOWERING MAJORITY THAN IT WILL LOSE FROM SUPPORTERS OF THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL IDEA WHO MAY SWITCH TO THE SPD. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THE FDP STATEMENT, HOWEVER, IS ONE OF TACTICAL GIMMICKRY. FEDERAL ECONOMICS MINISTER FRIDERICH'S ROLE, IN PARTICULAR, SMACKS TO MAY OBSERVERS OF OPPORTUNISM; AND HE APPEARS TO HAVE LOST CREDIBILITY AMONG HIS FORMER CDU COLLEAGUES IN THE LANE GOVERNMENT. (FRIDERICH'S SUPPORT FOR THE PRO-CDU STATEMENT WAS STRONG AND PERHAPS DECISIVE, BUT HE ABSTAINED FROM VOTING FOR IT OUT OF DEFERENCE TO HIS POSITION IN THE BONN GOVERNMENT, PREDICTED THE FEDERAL COALITION WOULD SURVIVE THE 1976 ELECTIONS, AND DECLARED THE CDU UNFIT TO GOVERN ON THE FEDERAL LEVEL.) THE FDP'S ANTI-CLERICAL "CHURCH PAPER", ADOPTED LAST OCTOBER, HAS APPARENTLY PLAYED NO ROLE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC RHEINLAND-PFALZ.

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6. ALTHOUGH PRINTED CAMPAIGN MATERIAL OFTEN REFERS TO LOCAL ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS (OF THE CDU PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT), CAMPAIGN ORATORY AND PUBLIC DISCUSSION IS DOMINATED BY NATIONAL QUESTIONS, SUCH AS UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION, AND BY POPULAR EXPECTATIONS OF WHICH PARTIES ARE BETTER EQUIPPED TO COPE WITH THESE PROBLEMS. GIVEN THE PRESENT NATIONAL STANDINGS OF THE PARTIES AND KHOL'S INTEREST IN USING THE ELECTION FOR NATIONAL PERSONAL PURPOSES, THE EMPHASIS IS NOT SURPRISING. HE AND HIS TEAM ARE EXTREMELY POPULAR, AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROVINCE ARE WIDELY RESPECTED IN ALL POLITICAL CIRCLES, MAKING THEM A VERY DIFFICULT TARGET FOR THE OPPOSITION. DURING THE LAST MONTHS OF THE PRESENT LANDTAG, THE SPD HAS SOUGHT TO CAPITALIZE

ON INTERIOR MINISTER HEINZ SCHWARZ' PREMATURE PUBLICA-
TION OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION ON THE BAADER-MEINHOF
TERRORISTS. SCHWARZ' JUSTIFICATION WAS THAT THE
SPD/FDP FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TENDED TO BELITTLE THE
THREAT BECAUSE OF ROMATIC LEFTIS SYMPATHY WITH
PROFESSED AIMS OF B-M AND SIMLAR GROUPS. THE SPD/FDP
CLAIMED THAT SCHWARZ WAS ALARMIST AND THAT IS "IRRESPON-
SIBLE ACTION AIDED THE TERRORISTS. THE PUBLIC
DID NOT SEEM TO RESPOND TO THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST SCHWARZ,
AND THE KIDNAPPING OF CDU LEADER LORENZ IN BERLIN LAST
WEEK SHOULD TURN SCHWARZ' ACT INTO A PLUS FOR THE CDU.

7. OPINION POLLS ON REHINLAND-PFALZ ELECTION PROS-
PECTS HAVE BEEN OUT OF DATE OR, IF RECENT,CLOSELY
GUARDED. TWO GENERAL THEMES HAVE RUN THROUGH THEM ALL:
THE CDU WILL RETAIN AND PROBABLY INCREASE ITS ABSOLUTE
MAJORITY, AND THE FDP'S CHANCES OF SURVIVING THE FIVE
PERCENT HURDLE ARE ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE. FDP FUNCTION-
ARIES ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE PARTY WILL ACHIEVE OR EVEN
SLIGHTLY EXCEED ITS 1971 PERCENTAGE, BUT THEY WOULD
PROBABLYBE HAPPY IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES TO SETTLE FOR
ANY RESULT THAT WILL KEEP THEM IN THE LANDTAG. OPINION
IS EVENLY DIVIDED WHETHER FDP WILL FINISH JUST ABOVE
OR BELOW FIVE PERCENT MARK. CDU RECOGNIZES THAT
OVERCONFIDENCE IS ITS CHIEF ENEMY, AND KOHL IS KEEPING
TO HIMSELF RESULTS OF APPARENTLY HIGHLY FAVORABLE
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POLL TAKEN AS FINAL STAGES OF CAMPAIGN BEGAN. ACCORD-
ING TO SOURCE CLOSE TO KOHL, POLL SUGGEST SPD MAY
FALL BELOW 30 PERCENT. PROFESSIONALS OF ALL THREE
PARTIES AND OTHER QUALIFIED OBSERVERS EXPECTED UNTIL
LORENZ ABDUCTION THAT CDU WOULD WIN ABOUT 53 PERCENT,
PLUS OR MINUS ONE PERCENT. EXPECTATION WITHIN CDU ON
EVE OF BERLIN ELECTION IS THAT LORENZ KIDNAPPING WILL
BE WORTH ONE OR TWO PERCENT TO RHEINLAND-PFALZ CDU
EVEN IF BERLIN AND BONN AUTHORITIES HANDLE SITUATION
AS WELL AS COULD BE EXPECTED. IF KIDNAPPING ENDS
TRAGICALLY, SYMPATHY WAVE WOULD ACCRUE EVEN MORE TO
CDU BENEFIT. TIMING THUS WORKS TO KOHL'S ADVANTAGE,
SINCE BERLIN EVENTS WILL RECEDE SOMEWHAT IN PUBLIC
CONSCIOUSNESS BEFORE APRIL AND MAY ELECTIONS.

8. COMMENT: IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF
RHEINLAND-PFALZ ELECTIONS ARE TWOFOLD: WILL CDU
VICTORY BE STRIKING ENOUGH TO GIVE KOHL IRREFUTABLE
CLAIM TO PARTY'S CHANCELLORE:ANDIDACY? AND WILL FDP
RESULT DEMONSTRATE FURTHER DISINTEGRATION OF THIRD
PARTY OR TIP IT FURTHER TWOARD INDEPENDENT STANCE? IF
FDP HOLDS OWN OR ESPECIALLY , IF IT AGAINS A BIT,

ELEMENTS WITHIN PARTY FAVORING DELINEATION FROM SPD
SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED. IF IT FALLS BELOW FIVE PERCENT,
PRO-CDU COALITION STATEMENT CAN BE BLAMED, AND FURTHER
INDICATIONS OF FDP'S FATE WOULD AWAIT REMAINING LANDTAG
ELECTIONS. IF CDU POLS 53 PERCENT OR SO, IT WOULD
STRENGTHEN KOHL'S CLAIM TO THE CHANCELLOR-CANDIDACY FOR
1976. IF THE PARTY WINS 55 PERCENT OR MORE, IT
SHOULD MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT FOR STOLTENBERG OR ANY
OTHER AS YET UNDECLARED CANDIDATE TO CHALLENGE KOHL'S
RIGHT TO THE TITLE. HARLAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, RHEINLAND-PFALZ, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975FRANKF01406
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750075-0472
From: FRANKFURT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750389/aaaadcrb.tel
Line Count: 233
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <29 MAY 2003 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <02 JUN 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF RHEINLAND-PFALZ PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS
TAGS: PINT, GE, CDU, SPD, FDP
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006